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For information on polling methods, contact:
PATRICK MURRAY
732-979-6769 (cell); 732-263-5858 (office)
pdmurray@monmouth.edu

NATIONAL: AVERAGE AMERICAN LACKS VOICE IN CONGRESS

Most families feel left behind by the economic recovery

More than 3-in-4 Americans say the average voter does not have enough influence over members of Congress while a similar number says that wealthy campaign donors have too much, according to the *Al Jazeera America/Monmouth University Poll*. Meanwhile, the typical American family struggles with a wide range of economic concerns, and many say that decisions made in Washington have actually made these concerns worse. Even though the national economy has been edging upwards, most American families feel left behind.

Money in Politics

The difference in perceptions of influence in Washington could not be more stark.

Who has too much influence over members of Congress? Three-in-four (75%) Americans say wealthy campaign donors do and 57% say the same about special interest groups.

Who has too little influence? The average American voter, according to a whopping 84% of the public.

Only 10% say that average voters have the right amount of influence over Congress and just 4% say voters have too much influence. For the more influential groups, just 11% of Americans say wealthy donors have the right amount of influence and only 10% say they have too little, while 11% of Americans say special interest groups have the right amount of influence and 23% say they have too little.

Similar numbers of Republicans (86%), Democrats (82%) and independents (83%) agree that average American voters have too little influence over members of Congress. Partisans also agree that wealthy campaign donors hold too much sway – a view held by 71% of Republicans, 77% of Democrats, and 77% of independents. Democrats (49%), though, are somewhat less likely than Republicans (62%)

and independents (61%) to feel that special interest groups have too much influence over members of Congress.

Just over 4-in-10 Americans (42%) say that members of Congress give a great deal of weight to the wishes of their wealthy donors before deciding whether to vote for or against legislation. Fewer than 1-in-4 believes that these donors' wishes play little (15%) or no (8%) role in how members of Congress vote. Another 30% say that members of Congress give some weight to their donors' views on a bill before casting a vote. Independents (50%) are more likely than Democrats (38%) and Republicans (33%) to feel that their elected officials in Congress give a great deal of consideration to the wishes of campaign donors before deciding how to vote.

"There's little question about who middle America thinks is calling the shots in Washington – and it's not them," said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute, which conducted the *Al Jazeera America/Monmouth University Poll*.

Impact on the American Family

The *Al Jazeera America/Monmouth University Poll* asked Americans to name their own family's biggest concern. Pocketbook issues rule the day, including worries about job security (16%), healthcare costs (15%), education costs (10%), everyday bills (14%), taxes (7%) and housing costs (4%). Other concerns include saving for retirement (3%) and Social Security (2%) and dealing with a family health issue (4%). Some Americans actually identify external issues as their family's main concern, including the overall economy (2%), education policy (2%), crime and safety (2%), the quality of government (2%), immigration (1%) and terrorism (1%).

Those earning less than \$25,000 a year (26%) are most likely to name everyday bills as their family's biggest concern when compared to those earning \$25,000 to \$50,000 (18%), \$50,000 to \$100,000 (10%), or \$100,000 or more (6%). In comparison, Americans at all income levels express similar levels of concern about job security, ranging between 15% and 18% regardless of income.

When considering the impact of the federal government on their family's top issue, nearly half (47%) say the actions of Washington have hurt their family's situation. Only 14% say the federal government's actions have helped their family regarding this top concern. Another 38% say Washington has had no real impact one way or the other. There is no difference in this opinion by household income, although Republicans (63%) are more likely than independents (46%) and, especially, Democrats (33%) to say the actions of the federal government have actually worsened their family's top concern.

The poll also found that most Americans feel left behind by the recent upturn in the national economy. Fully 6-in-10 say the national economic recovery has provided not much (32%) or no benefit at all (29%) to their own family situation. Fewer than 1-in-10 (8%) say their family has benefitted a great

deal while another 31% say their family has benefitted somewhat from the national economic recovery. Interestingly, Democrats (52%) are more likely than Republicans (32%) and independents (35%) to report feeling at least some benefit from the recovery. This may be more a sign of support for President Obama as the leader of the government than it is a reflection of their personal financial condition. When this opinion is examined by household income, only about 1-in-3 of those earning under \$25,000 (31%) or \$25,000 to \$50,000 (35%) say they have benefitted from the economic recovery, compared to 44% of those earning \$50,000 to \$100,000 and 49% of those earning \$100,000 or more who say the same.

“Not only do most Americans feel that the economic recovery has left them behind, many believe that recent actions of the federal government have actually made things worse for their families,” said Murray. “Pres. Obama’s call for a middle class tax cut offset by tax hikes on the wealthy seems like a deliberate attempt to address this pessimistic undercurrent. Time will tell if it works.”

The Al Jazeera America/Monmouth University Poll was conducted by telephone from January 13 to 15, 2015 with 1,003 adults in the United States. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.1 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute in West Long Branch, N.J. and cosponsored by Al Jazeera America in New York, N.Y.

The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

(* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

1. Do [READ ITEM] – have too much, not enough, or the right amount of influence over members of Congress? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

-- Average American voters

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Too much	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%	6%	5%	2%	2%
Not enough	84%	86%	83%	82%	82%	86%	83%	83%	83%	84%	88%
Right amount	10%	10%	10%	10%	12%	7%	11%	9%	8%	12%	8%
(VOL) Depends/ Don't know	3%	1%	3%	4%	2%	2%	4%	2%	3%	3%	2%

-- Wealthy campaign donors

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Too much	75%	71%	77%	77%	68%	79%	76%	66%	77%	80%	78%
Not enough	10%	8%	9%	12%	11%	11%	8%	20%	8%	6%	8%
Right amount	11%	16%	10%	6%	16%	7%	9%	10%	10%	11%	12%
(VOL) Depends/ Don't know	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	6%	4%	5%	4%	2%

-- Special interest groups

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Too much	57%	62%	61%	49%	42%	64%	66%	42%	53%	65%	74%
Not enough	23%	22%	20%	28%	31%	22%	15%	36%	26%	17%	12%
Right amount	11%	10%	10%	11%	18%	7%	7%	14%	10%	10%	9%
(VOL) Depends/ Don't know	9%	6%	8%	12%	9%	7%	12%	8%	11%	8%	4%

2. How much weight do members of Congress give to their campaign donors' wishes when they decide whether to vote for or against legislation – a great deal, some, not much, or none at all?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Great deal	42%	33%	50%	38%	36%	45%	44%	34%	39%	46%	53%
Some	30%	41%	25%	30%	37%	26%	29%	34%	31%	29%	28%
Not much	15%	14%	12%	19%	14%	15%	15%	19%	15%	15%	9%
None at all	8%	8%	7%	8%	10%	7%	6%	9%	10%	4%	6%
(VOL) Depends/ Don't know	5%	5%	6%	6%	3%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	4%

3. Turning to issues closer to home, what is the biggest concern facing your family right now?
[LIST WAS NOT READ]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Job security, unemployment	16%	16%	16%	15%	15%	16%	16%	18%	16%	15%	15%
Healthcare costs	15%	20%	14%	12%	10%	17%	17%	13%	13%	17%	16%
Everyday bills	14%	14%	15%	13%	14%	17%	12%	26%	18%	10%	6%
College tuition, school costs	10%	6%	9%	13%	15%	10%	4%	10%	6%	13%	10%
Taxes	7%	7%	9%	5%	7%	8%	6%	2%	6%	10%	14%
Housing, mortgage, rent	4%	2%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Retirement saving	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	5%	4%
Social Security, seniors	2%	4%	1%	2%	0%	2%	5%	3%	2%	1%	3%
Other family finances	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%
Family illness, health	4%	4%	2%	7%	3%	3%	7%	7%	3%	4%	3%
The economy	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Education policy	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	1%	0%	3%	2%	2%
Safety, crime	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%
Quality of government	2%	2%	3%	1%	1%	2%	3%	1%	1%	3%	2%
Immigration	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	3%	0%	3%
Terrorism	1%	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Other	4%	3%	6%	3%	5%	3%	4%	3%	2%	6%	5%
Don't know/No answer	8%	7%	6%	13%	14%	4%	8%	6%	11%	5%	8%

[The following question was asked only those who mentioned a concern in Q5: n=926, moe=+/-3.2%]

4. Thinking about this most important concern, have the actions of the federal government in the past few years helped, hurt, or had no real impact on this concern?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Helped	14%	8%	11%	24%	14%	12%	15%	17%	14%	14%	11%
Hurt	47%	63%	46%	33%	39%	53%	48%	39%	46%	51%	56%
No real impact	38%	28%	41%	41%	47%	33%	35%	43%	39%	35%	32%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%

5. Recent indicators have shown that the U.S. economy has been growing, including lower unemployment, higher productivity, and a record high Dow Jones average. How much has your family benefitted from this economic upturn – a great deal, some, not much, or not at all?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Great deal	8%	5%	6%	13%	8%	9%	6%	1%	11%	9%	11%
Some	31%	27%	29%	39%	30%	32%	31%	30%	24%	35%	38%
Not much	32%	35%	32%	28%	38%	26%	32%	34%	34%	31%	23%
Not at all	29%	32%	34%	20%	24%	34%	30%	34%	30%	25%	28%
(VOL) Don't know	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%

The *Al Jazeera America/Monmouth University Poll* was sponsored by Al Jazeera America and the Monmouth University Polling Institute. Monmouth is responsible for all aspects of the survey design, data weighting and analysis. The poll was conducted from January 13 to 15, 2015 with a national random sample of 1,003 adults age 18 and older. This includes 673 contacted by a live interviewer on a landline telephone and 330 contacted by a live interviewer on a cell phone, in English. Final sample is weighted for region, age, education, gender and race based on US Census information. Data collection support provided by Braun Research (field) and SSI (RDD sample). For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points (unadjusted for sample design). Sampling error can be larger for sub-groups (see table below). In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

<i>POLL DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>			
26% Rep	49% Male	31% 18-34	65% White
44% Ind	51% Female	38% 35-54	12% Black
30% Dem		31% 55+	15% Hispanic
			8% Asian/Other

	MARGIN OF ERROR										
	TOTAL	PARTY ID			AGE			INCOME			
		Rep	Ind	Dem	18-34	35-54	55+	<\$25K	\$25 to \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
<i>Unweighted N</i>	1,003	250	478	267	198	295	508	186	232	278	222
<i>moe</i>	3.1%	6.2%	4.5%	6.0%	7.0%	5.7%	4.4%	7.2%	6.4%	5.9%	6.6%

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